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# GENDER AND WORK IN TOURISM: THE ROLE OF FAMILY PANSİYONLARI IN TURKEY'S BOZCAADA ISLAND

*Dr. Selin Önen<sup>1</sup>*

## ÖZET

**B**u makale Türkiye'de Bozcaada'daki aile işletmeciliği örneğinde küçük ölçekli turizm konaklaması olan pansiyonlarda, turizm işinin toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini nasıl etkilediğini tartışmaktadır. Turizm bir geçim kaynağı olarak Bozcaada'da 1990'lardan itibaren başlamıştır. Adanın yerleşiklerinin temel geçim kaynakları yakın zamana dek bağcılık, balıkçılık ve devlet memurluğu olmuştur. Fakat bu alanlarda yaşanan ekonomik zorluklardan dolayı son beş yılda turizm faaliyeti performansının en yüksek noktasına erişerek gerek ada yerleşikleri gerekse pansiyon işletmeciliği amacıyla adaya gelen yeni yerleşikler için temel geçim kaynağı olmaya başlamıştır. Bu makale, temel olarak turizm işinin özellikle kadınları sosyal ve ekonomik yönlerden etkilediğini tartışmaktadır. Turizm işi kadınlara hanehalkı içerisinde pazarlık gücü ve bir tür sosyal sermaye sağlayabilmesine rağmen, aile işletmeciliğindeki geleneksel cinsiyete dayalı iş bölümü belirgindir. Dolayısıyla toplumsal cinsiyet ve kültürün karmaşıklığından dolayı turizm kalkınması ile kadının güçlendirilmesi arasında doğrudan bir ilişki bulunmamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** turizm, toplumsal cinsiyet, Bozcaada, kalkınma, aile, ada

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## ABSTRACT

**T**his article discusses how tourism work affects gender roles in the exemplary of family business on the small scale tourism accommodation called pansiyon (guesthouses) in the Bozcaada Island in Turkey. Tourism, as a means of livelihood, has started in the Bozcaada Island since 1990s. The inhabitants of the island were mainly subsisted on vine cultivation, fishing and civil service. However, facing noticeable economic difficulty in those activities, tourism has gained peak performances and has become the main source of livelihood in the last five years for both island inhabitants and new residents coming for running pansiyons. This paper mainly argues that tourism work affects especially women in terms of social and economic aspects. Although tourism might provide women a bargaining position in the household and a kind of social capital, traditional sexual division of labor at workplace is apparent at this family business. Hence, there is not a direct relationship between tourism development and women empowerment because of the complexity of gender relations and culture.

**Keywords:** tourism, gender, Bozcaada, development, family, island

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered as a means of achieving economic growth in both economically developed and developing nations (Swain, 1995; Telfer& Sharpley 2008) However, the focus in Turkish tourism has been predominantly on economic and political aspects, adopting relevant ‘macro theories’ and ignoring local experiences and cultural changes (İncirlioğlu and Çulcuoğlu, 2004). Thereby, tourism as a means of economic policy affects inevitably the individual’s daily lives and gender relations in the household. In this regard, according to Bolak, Turkish family reflects the dynamics of patrilineal and patrilocal household structures of the Middle East counties where “family work is a particularly critical site for the construction and renegotiation of gender relations in the household” (1997:413).

The economy in Bozcaada is largely based on tourism since 1990s. There are currently 22 hotels and 44 *pansiyons* [*pansiyon* is a “Turkish term for tourist accommodation establishment with fewer than ten rooms” (Tucker& Hazel 2008)] operating in the island. The main impetus behind the development of tourism in the island appears with the ferryboat in 1996, which made transportation to the island easier. Apart from tourism, the island economy is based on grapery, winemaking and fishing ([http://www.bozcaada.gov.tr/default\\_B0.aspx?content=1012](http://www.bozcaada.gov.tr/default_B0.aspx?content=1012) accessed as February 6 2014). Today, tourism activity overwhelms traditional practices of fishing, viniculture as well as rural work. As Can says (2008:11), there are 2427 inhabitants living in the island in 2000. However, population increases five times in July and August months. Like İncirlioğlu& Çulcuoğlu’s (2004) work in Mediterranean village in Kaleköy, after the onset of tourism in Bozcaada there have been considerable economic and demographic changes. Likewise in Bozcaada, the transformation of economic changes occurred in a way that predominant economic sources turned from agriculture and fishing into the tourism. According to İncirlioğlu and Çulcuoğlu, “the change from a subsistence based economy to an economy that urges accumulation brings along a set of behavioral and attitudinal changes such as risk- taking and entrepreneurial activities that makes sense in a capitalist society” (2004: 31).

In this framework, this study attempts to understand how tourism affects family relations and gender roles in the exemplary of small scale tourism accommodation called *pansiyons* in Turkey’s third largest island located at the Aegean Sea.

## Method

In order to evaluate the gender roles in Bozcaada's *pansiyons*, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the owners of family *pansiyons*. I conducted this research in September 2013. There are 12 interviewees participated to this study. I also benefited from participant observation technique. During the research, I was also staying at a family *pansiyon*. This study is based on qualitative research method to understand interviewee's own views about gender roles in their families. In addition, these families have nuclear family structure.

Most of the interviewees have been living in the island nearly for 40 years. Both women and men get primary school or secondary school education. There are also new residents came to run *pansiyon* whose education level is higher than the old residents. The interviewee's ages ranges between 40 and 66. Before *pansiyon* management, men were civil servants, fisherman and shopkeeper. Having been retired, *pansiyon* management served as an additional budget for them. On the other hand, women were generally housewives, rural worker and tailor.

## Social and Demographic Aspects of Bozcaada

Bozcaada is the third largest island of Turkey located at the Aegean Sea. The attraction to the island is not only related to the ecological features but also result of authenticity and historical aspects. The owners of the *pansiyons* are mainly from Çanakkale's Bayramiç town and settled to the island as a result of citizenship politics. In Bozcaada, Greek minorities (Rums) and Turks lived together. "In Turkish, 'Rum' usually refers to a person who belongs to the Christian Orthodox religion, who speaks the modern Greek language and who is not a Greek citizen" (Millas, cited in Çalışkan, 2010:66). In 1960s, Rum population in Turkey had affected from Turkification process in İstanbul and Bozcaada and Gökçeada (İmroz) islands. Gökçeada population was composed of only Rums except for the civil servants. In Bozcaada Rum and Turk population was equal. However, due to the fear of plebiscite request by Rum population, as happened in Cyprus, Turkish government decided to resettle 6000 Turks to the islands (Akgönül, 2012). Today, there remain a few Rum families living in Bozcaada. There are also Rum and Turk neighborhoods in the island. Most of Rum houses were bought by Turks and converted to the *pansiyons* which attract the great many tourists nowadays.

In addition, due to the site protection law it is forbidden to build new apartments or to add additional floor to existing houses. Hence, many of those houses are rebuilt and repaired. Most of the owners of the *pansiyons* live in different houses in the island or some of them return to the their homes in Bayramiç. Today, there are also new inhabitants of the islands who came for running *pansiyons*. Hence, the inward migration appears to be related to tourism (İncirlioğlu and Çulcuoğlu, 2004).

## Tourism and Gender

Work in tourism is highly gendered and women are important producers in the tourism industry (Sinclair, 2005: 6, Ferguson, 2011:237, Kinnaird& Hall, 1996:95; Harvey&Hunt and Harris 1995; Pritchard& Morgan 2000). As Sinclair suggests, "women are important producers in the tourism industry...Work in tourism, as in other sectors of the economy, is structured along gender lines and generally conforms to dominant gender roles" (2005:6). Moreover, capitalism and patriarchy are separate systems within dual system analysis. Although capitalism creates hierarchical structures ignoring

whether men or women occupy specific positions within it, access to occupations is determined by patriarchal relations, which involve men's control over women's labour. In this regard, gendered division of labour within workforce overlaps with the traditional norms and expectations (Sinclair, 2005:6-7). In addition to gender roles, the majority of women's work concentrated in seasonal, part-time and low-paid activities in tourism sector (Ferguson, 2011).

Although this clear segmentation is most obvious in larger scale tourism enterprises, women may be prevented from doing particular types of work in small and micro-scale businesses in many cultural contexts (Tucker &Boonabaana, 2012:441). For instance, in Göreme ( a town in Cappadocia located at Central Anatolian region in Turkey) women are not powerful since men are still income earners and women's work and earnings are regarded as supplementary (Tucker &Boonabaan, 2012).

In this regard, tourism development policies might follow solely the empowerment of women in economic sense, while ignoring the gendered roles. In general framework of development policies, the field of women/gender and development (WID/GAD) made women's economic empowerment a priority and small scale programs carried out by women's organizations and through microcredit projects. (Jaquette & Staud 2007). Pro-poor growth or poverty alleviation had a significant impact on gender equality at tourism policy in the late 1990s. In this framework, empowerment of women is limited solely economically and so as to income generation. However, this paradigm conceals the gender inequalities because "economic empowerment through tourism work does not automatically translate into a meaningful redress of power relations beyond a relative improvement in economic conditions" (Ferguson, 2011:246). Like Ferguson, Tucker &Boonabaana (2012) criticize "externally organized pro-poor projects aimed at women's economic empowerment might be problematic if the longer-term implications of the resulting changes are not considered" (2012:440). Herein, gender and development paradigm is parallel to the liberal feminism which is based on the idea that "women are a vulnerable group in need of help in accessing employment and income generating projects" (Tucker &Boonabaana, 2012: 438).

Erman et al. (2002) make a distinction between the Western meaning of empowerment and Third World experience on the ground that the term of empowerment in economic sense does not automatically bring about women's empowerment since the role of culture appears as a mediating factor. The participation in labour market is culturally constructed. If we want to understand the empowerment of women in a particular society, as they suggest "we should look at both the structural conditions under which women live their lives and the ideological/cultural constructions of women in society, as well as how women perceive themselves in their relations with other people, particularly with men in their families (Erman et al, 2002, p.396). Thus, culture and family are also critical for a new development strategy for women (Jaquette & Staud, 2007).

In Turkey, some researchers in tourism studies mostly explain *pansiyon* management in the context of development and modernity model but ignore gender as a variable (Akyol, 2012; Fidan ve Nam 2012; Uçar 2012). Among these, Uçar (2012) evaluates house *pansiyons* (guest houses) as one of the economic entrepreneurship activity and defends *pansiyons* as contributing economically and socially to rural tourism, while ignoring gender issue. Fidan and Nam (2012) argue that women have important place in rural tourism. Handicraft is seen as an important activity which brings women an advantageous position. Although, they see women as important actors in economic development, they ignore the sexual division of labor at tourism. Similarly, Uçar (2012) sees a similarity between women and economic development based on Çanakkale's Gökçeada's villages where she made an anthropological research in terms of *pansiyons*.

Hence, as Tucker (2008) argues, tourism is a process that is not simply a shift from one condition to another. She gives examples from many cases where women access to tourism employment tends to fall behind that of men, which reflects local norms regarding the sexual division of labor. On the other hand, small and micro enterprises and especially family run businesses are relatively beneficial to women, offering women to earn extra income and to improve their status both within and outside of the household (pp.87-88).

In Bozcaada Island, *pansiyon* establishments show that there is a gendered division in social and economic activities in the tourism work. Women undertake traditional roles in the *pansiyons* but this new business also brings new roles in their households. These roles are not related to a bargaining position in the patriarchal household but have opened a public space and empowered women socially.

### The Role of *Pansiyons* in Gender Roles

The ownership of *pansiyon* enterprises in Bozcaada is shared generally by married couples or amongst other family members. This tourism activity leads to different results with regard to gender. Tourism generates extra income for the household but a new experience for most women. While tourism provides employment for women, men of the community do not perceive tourism as notable. When I asked men interviewees how they evaluate this job, they replied me as "easy money" or "toy business".

The research shows that *pansiyon* management affects women's lives rather than men since women have started to work for the first time. As Möller argues, "local traditions of how to run businesses were not only a means to survive financially, but also reflected more cultural dimensions" (2012:86). Women interviewees generally stated that they are happy to run this family business since they meet different people and they get socialized. Although some of their husbands do not want to continue this job, their wives insist to carry on the business. Tourism work seems to contribute to destroy the sharp division between the public and the private sphere that women become more integrated with the "outside world".

I conducted a semi-structured interview with an old woman who is 66 years old and who runs her house as a *pansiyon*. She lives in the island seasonally in order to run her *pansiyon*. She is hiring a young girl to help her. In addition, she was illiterate before doing this job. She needed to go literacy courses to follow the customers' accounts. *Pansiyon* management seems affected this old woman's life in social terms. She is doing this job as a hobby-related activity. With her words,

"I just want to do it, not for an ambition. I would like to work, I do not want to just sit and be wanderer".

Another interviewee emphasized how *pansiyon* management changed his wife's life, who was a housewife before this job.

"For her, something happened like that. Most of the guests are coming from İstanbul but I do not know its exact percentage. You meet with different persons. You sleep and have breakfast with those people in the same place. She is not veiled but sometimes performs pray. If you give her vine, she would drink at the same time she would fast. She is a classic Turkish woman. It [running *pansiyon*] was an ordinary experience for me. but change for her. Shall we say that she became self-aware? Her objections started. Did she become conceited? If you have women get educated, it happens like this. Of course, I am kidding".

In a similar vein, another woman interviewee talked about her *pansiyon* management experience. She migrated to Bozcaada since her husband was working in a construction site. She started to work as a domestic laborer. She used to live in Central Anatolia region of Turkey and she stated that working

life for woman was assumed as a taboo and shame. Hence, she could not tell to her family that she was working. She is running *pansiyon* with her family now. Actually, she is the main responsible person in the *pansiyon* where her husband just deals with only the accounting issues. She seemed self-confident and she talked about how working life changed her life.

"I went domestic cleaning for years in that island. Everybody, notables of the island liked me. It was a shame in my city. I am not penitent for working. Look, I set up a business for my children...I feel more self-confident. If they hire me, I may run a hotel with 5000 capacity in abroad. Although I am graduated from primary school, I run a small guesthouse. You created by your own, you did everything. Now, I do not fear anything in this life".

This quotation shows that women are affected by running *pansiyon* business both in economic and social terms but this business activity does not bring economic independency. There are similarities between Bozcaada island case and Möller's (2012) study conducted in Latvia's rural district. She studied women entrepreneurship and found that the decision to start a business within tourism might be considered 'accidental'. Similarly, Bozcaada households also started to manage *pansiyons* accidentally and they had no tourism backgrounds. Möller (2012) argues that entrepreneurship is a new source and strategy for income on accidental bases which may push women into entrepreneurship in post-socialist countries. She finds that "[t]he idea to start a business within rural tourism was considered attractive partly for the possibility of combining house work, family care, and work within tourism, and partly as a way of gaining more economic independence from her husband" (2012: 83).

The idea of economic independence might not overlap directly with Bozcaada case. The main reason is that even though women are more actively involved in business than their husbands at running *pansiyon* management, mostly their husbands control the family budget. In addition, there is a clear division of labor in terms of gender roles in *pansiyon* management. Before conducting a study in Bozcaada, I came as a tourist to the island. I made a reservation to a *pansiyon* before I came. It was a family owned *pansiyon* and women I talked on the phone said that "we will meet you at the ferry to bring you to the *pansiyon*". Her father picked up the guests and the women was staying at the *pansiyon*. This observation made me think about the division of labor in terms of gender. My study clearly revealed that division of labor occurs in terms of cultural and social gender roles in the society. Hence, men generally deal with the public sphere vs. women deals with in private sphere. In this regard, men generally meet the guests and deal with the monetary affairs of *pansiyon*, women generally stay at the *pansiyon*, answering the phones, cooking, cleaning, etc. Although most of the job is undertaken by women, most of the men control the budget. Moreover, apart from minor exceptions mostly men are the official owners of the *pansiyons*. As Kinnaird & Hall argue, "changing gender relations are expressed through the way in which tourism interacts with families and changing family structure. For example, family situations and household status will often determine women's access to employment opportunities" (1996:98).

With regard to division of labor, most of the women interviewees complained about how hard it was to deal with the *pansiyon* since their husbands did not help in cooking, preparing breakfast for the guests or cleaning works. One interviewee stated that she was happy to meet different people in her house but she could not manage this entrepreneurship because her husband was so inactive in this job and they also could not prepare the house for the guests. Guests wanted a separate bathroom and private sphere but they had no budget to arrange their houses. With her words,

"My husband did not accompany and help me. I was dealing with the job and my child was 1 years old... These are old Rum houses, all of which lack the small garden. I was preparing a breakfast table at the street because it (Bozcaada) was not crowded in those times, now everywhere is full with *pansiyons*.. My husband did not help me whether in laying table or in buying a bread. Of course, there is also washing things. Guests are planning to stay for one week but here is windy. They sometimes

stay for just one day. You have to wash the staffs again. My kid was little and I had too much difficulty. This job has to be done together with your husband. Some women's husbands help them in preparing breakfast, buying bread, etc. With just one person, this job is very difficult to carry on but still pleasurable. I would like to do in any case".

Apart from local residents of island, there are also new residents coming to Bozcaada to run *pansiyon*. The new residents are generally coming from İstanbul and they have middle class background and they are educated. In fact, *pansiyon* runners do not know each other well, especially the new ones. Inward migration can be seen as another process linked to the tourism development. Division of labor also appears in their *pansiyons* but the control of the budget seems to be more equal. Women who previously were housewives also affected from this entrepreneurship both economically and socially. However, I argue that the entrepreneurship in *pansiyon* management does not challenge the traditional gender roles but it reproduces it along with restraining women in private sphere. In addition, there is a clear division between women's and men's work. As Pritchard and Morgan argue, "while some of this research has shown that tourism may bring benefits to individual or even groups of women within specific communities, ...[m]ore often, it has confirmed and reinforced gendered roles and relationships" (Pritchard and Morgan, 2000:888). Moreover, this study overlaps with Möller's rural tourism in Latvia in the sense that "the work within tourism tended to have close parallels to the everyday unpaid work in the household, still remained 'women's work and responsibility, as well as did the care for the children (Möller, 2012:90).

There are two similar cases of Spain, one in Catalonia and other in Galicia in which women became entrepreneurs of rural tourism. Women have carried the burden of organizing and performing most of the chores involved, so there is a traditional division of labor. The critical point is that women are main actors in the development of rural tourism in Spain. (Ramon, Canoves& Valdovinos, 1995). As Swain argues, "this type of domestic tourism development is shown to have similar effects specifically on women providers" (Swain 1995, p.260). According to Morn, Roschelle & Facio (2002, p.45), "operating a guesthouse is not only an expensive proposition, but is also labor intensive. Political economists have historically overlooked this type of small business ownership because it is women who have typically done it". Moreover, they argue the ownership of guesthouse in Cuba in global restructuring process. Professional women move to this type of tourism job since they might get more money. Nevertheless, the same pattern occurs that a typical workday generally reflects a strict gender division of labor which is often associated with traditional housework.

Similar to Spain, Bozcaada families could not have readily initiate *pansiyon* management activity without women participation. In this regard, children are not active in this family job. The families who run *pansiyons* hire especially women and students seasonally. Therefore, the *pansiyon* management is executed totally through in terms of gender lines. One of my interviewee was working in the *pansiyon* but her boss was living in İstanbul. She said that she came to island for this job. She used to be a cleaning worker at a hotel in Edremit. Her husband and her son were working in the constructions in the island. She is gaining her salary only in the summer, tourism season. However, she complaint that since rents are so expensive in the island, her family could not afford it. Moreover, the construction work stops during the winter, so her husband and son could not find a job. Hence, tourism workers' situation also does not fit into sustainable tourism.

## CONCLUSION

This study tries to show that tourism work is a highly gendered activity and constitutes division of labor in terms of cultural and social gender roles. Tourism entrepreneurship serves as a kind of additional budget for families who runs family *pansiyons* in Bozcaada. Women are more actively participating to work than their husbands at running *pansiyons*. By this tourism work, women who used to be housewives started to make money, but their husbands generally control the family budget. On the other hand, women become more integrated with the “outside world” by meeting different people and get education as development paradigm assumes. This study also discusses that the term empowerment should not be considered within the economic arena but should also overlap with the cultural arena. In addition, this family entrepreneurship seems to affect women’s lives socially and culturally more than economic aspects. Although this kind of activity affects women’s social and economic lives more than men, tourism employment does not challenge the pre-existing unequal gender relations.

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